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SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHT BENEFITS OF FOURTH FLEET

11. (U) SUMMARY: Thanks to the combined efforts of the USS Kearsarge, SouthCom, and the U.S. Embassies in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, Venezuelans received a thorough and accurate look into the humanitarian work of the Navy's newly-reactivated Fourth Fleet. Reporters from two major Venezuelan daily newspapers saw the Kearsarge provide humanitarian services, respond to local needs, and strengthen ties with the Dominican Republic. The result was two excellent newspaper articles that clearly demonstrated the Fourth Fleet's Mission, while countering considerable Venezuelan government propaganda. Post wishes to thank all those who made this successful trip possible. END SUMMARY

12. (U) SouthCom's reactivation of the Fourth Fleet provoked forceful condemnations from the Venezuelan government, which alleges that the United States' intent is to intimidate Venezuela and the Hemisphere. To counter this misinformation, post worked with SouthCom and the staff of the USS Kearsarge to bring Venezuelan journalists onboard the ship during its stop in the Dominican Republic (DR) to get a first-hand look at what the multinational military and NGO staff do as part of the Fleet's "Continuing Promise" mission.

13. (U) Thanks to the efforts of Dan Day, Chris Hwang, and Eduardo Villavicencio and his SouthCom staff, two reporting teams traveled to the DR from October 6 - 9 and had access to the crew, patients, government and non-government officials on the ship, and accompanied the crew to visits to medical clinics and construction projects.

14. (U) The Kearsarge team not only arranged these visits, but both Commodore Frank Ponds and Captain Walt Towns met personally with the reporters to brief them and hold informal discussions about the Fourth Fleet, Continuing Promise, and relations between the United States and other Western Hemisphere countries. The reporters highlighted comments by Commander Ponds and Cpt. Towns in the stories. The appreciation reporters felt for the personal attention and information "from the top" was evident both in their articles and personal comments during the trip.

15. (U) Ultimas Noticias, the country's leading national daily newspaper (circulation: 250,000; tabloid style) devoted two pages to the visit in its Monday, October 20th edition. The reporter wrote three stories, each focusing on different aspects of the Mission. He discussed the opposition of the Venezuelan government to the Fourth Fleet and then featured Cpt. Ponds' comments about the humanitarian role of the Fleet. The articles and accompanying photographs highlighted the international aspects of the Mission, the humanitarian focus, and the partnership of nations that made Continuing Promise a success. Generally a "Chavista light" news outlet, these articles in Ultimas Noticias exposed a politically and socioeconomically diverse cross section of Venezuelans to the role of the Fourth Fleet and helped correct Venezuelan government misinformation.

16. (U) The article and pictures in the Sunday, October 19, edition of El Carabobeno (circulation 50,000, broad sheet style) also furthered this goal. Through interviews with

patients, the reporter painted a vivid picture of the medical and infrastructure needs of the Dominicans and how the Kearsarge staff fulfilled them. One woman was quoted as saying that Continuing Promise's attention to her town was "a miracle."

¶7. (U) This reporting trip immensely furthered post's efforts to counter misinformation about the Fourth Fleet's mission and brought a human face to U.S. military forces.

¶8. (U) Post thanks Commodore Ponds, Cpt. Towns, Eng. Day, Col Villavicencio, PAO Gary Keith, their colleagues and staffs for their outstanding contributions that made this reporting tour a resounding success. Post looks forward to future cooperation with SouthCom to present the Venezuelan public with accurate information about the Fourth Fleet.

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